Her følger utrag om Kristofer Janson fra boken:

Life story of Rasmus B. Anderson, written by himself, with the assistance of Albert O. Barton

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CHAPTER LXVII.

KRISTOFER JANSON.

I have already given an account of my interest in the Norwegian “landsmaal” and how I in 1874 wrote and published the only book that has appeared on that subject on this side of the Atlantic, viz., “Den Norske Maalsag.” This little book brought me into very intimate correspondence with the Norwegian poet Kristofer Janson, who was at that time one of the most talented of that group of writers who made use of the “landsmaal” as the vehicle of their poems and stories.

Kristofer Janson had with Christoffer Bruun established in Gausdal, in Gudbrandsdal, one of those popular high schools of which Grundtvig had caused so many to be founded in Denmark. Janson also had the reputation of being one of Norway's most popular orators.

I was constantly considering what could be done to awaken a larger interest in Norwegian language, history, literature and tradition, and I conceived the idea that much could be achieved in that direction, if Kristofer Janson could be induced to speak to his countrymen in the various cities and settlements in this country. I corresponded with him on this

subject until I finally got him persuaded and he agreed to come. This was in 1879. I served to a large extent as his impressario and financial agent. I advertised him as thoroughly as possible and made engagements for him throughout the northwest. He had his headquarters at our home in Madison. After giving 299 scores of lectures in halls, churches and schoolhouses he returned to Norway with fully $3,000 net proceeds, a sum which it would have taken him many years to accumulate in Norway.

Kristofer Janson, was at that time, though somewhat tainted with Grundtvigianism, thought to be fairly orthodox in his theology. In his addresses he abstained rigidly from touching upon religious topics. He was accordingly hospitably received at all Norwegian Lutheran parsonages and he was permitted to speak in a large number of Norwegian Lutheran churches. He was received and entertained as one of Norway's distinguished sons and his visit did much to promote an interest in Norwegiandom on this side of the Atlantic. After him came a still more renowned son of Norway in the person of Björnsterne Björnson, but before I tell of the visit of the latter I must finish my story of Kristofer Janson.

When Björnson was here in 1881 both he and Kristofer Janson had abandoned the faith of their fathers. Georg Brandes of Denmark, of Jewish descent, became the great interpreter and promoter of modern liberal European ideas, first in Denmark and then in Norway and Sweden. He brought the ideas of John Stuart Mill, Taine, Ernst Renan and Zola to the attention of his Scandinavian readers. In 1879 Björnson, who up to that time had been an energetic and enthusiastic defender of the Christian faith, went over into Georg Brandes' camp bag and baggage. And there he remained to the close of his life. With his strong personality and great eloquence he took many of the lesser lights with him.

Though I never formally identified myself with this movement, still I too was carried away by it. I thought I saw in Brandes, in Björnson, in Ibsen and in the rest of them, the sun of a new day rising in Scandinavia and while I myself wrote very little that might be called prejudicial or damaging to the Lutheran church or the cause of Christianity, still I kept in close touch with the Scandinavian leaders and did all I could to secure 300 them readers

and admirers in America. And while I am taking my readers into my confidence I may as well make a clean breast of it and add that I remained a pretty full-fledged agnostic in religious matters until toward the close of the '80s. I had worshipped these leaders of liberal thought at a distance, and distance, you know, lends enchantment to the view, but after spending several years in Copenhagen in close contact with these eminent representatives of modern ideas and observing the effect of their broad views on their own lives and on their surroundings I began to think that this new preaching was not the dawning of a new day, but rather the twilight of a coming night. In my associations with Bishop Monrad, Bishop Fog, the estimable and learned P. A. Vedel and others my suspicions against the new cult were strengthened, and when I returned to America I, by the grace of God, brought back with me the faith in which I had been confirmed as a boy before the altar of the Lutheran church.

While Björnson was in America during the winter of 1880–'81 he repeatedly urged me to find a position for Kristofer Janson among his countrymen in America. Janson had abandoned his Lutheran faith, but instead of following Björnson into agnosticism, or what may be called Ingersollism, he accepted the views of the great Swedish scholar Victor Rydberg and became a Unitarian. Janson was an exceedingly lovable character. He was mild mannered, gifted as a poet and speaker and with his long soft hair and beard he had the appearance of an evangelist. Indeed he had a great resemblance to the conventional portraits of our Saviour. Björnson believed that there were enough of liberals among the Norwegians in this country to support Kristofer Janson as their spiritual adviser.

While I was not so hopeful and enthusiastic in this respect as Björnson, still I promised to do all in my power to find an opening for Kristofer Janson. And this is what happened. 301 One day in the spring of '81 I met in the capitol park in Madison Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones and the Rev. H. M. Simmons, both prominent ministers in the Unitarian church. Rev. Mr. Jones is now in Chicago and Mr. Simmons died while pastor of a church in Minneapolis. I knew both of them well and so I suggested to them that if they cared to have any missionary work done for Unitarianism among the Norwegians in America I had

the right man for them. I then exhausted my eloquence in eulogizing Kristofer Janson as a man, as a theologian,—he being a graduate in theology from the University of Norway, —as a speaker, novelist and poet. Mr. Jones and Mr. Simmons approved with ardor what I had proposed and said they were going to Boston to attend the annual national meeting of the Unitarian conference and would lay the matter before that body with their hearty recommendation. I urged that the conference should guarantee Kristofer Janson a salary of $1,000 a year for three years. They had no doubt that they would succeed in securing this guaranty and agreed to write me from Boston.

I at once wrote a letter to Kristofer Janson in Norway and said that if the matter turned out as I expected I would cable to him one word “Come!” In due course of time Jenkin Lloyd Jones informed me that the conference in Boston had voted Kristofer Janson a salary of $1,000 a year for three years. I cabled the word “Come” to him and he immediately packed his grip and came.

On his arrival in Madison that same year we canvassed the matter of location and decided that Minneapolis would be most central for his headquarters. He therefore located there. He succeeded in organizing a congregation and building a church in that city. He established another church in Brown county, Minnesota, and gathered a small congregation in Hudson, Wis. In addition to his preaching he devoted considerable time to lecturing and to writing.

The next year, 1882, he brought his wife and children. Two of his sons are physicians and one a dentist in Seattle, Washington. It pains me in this connection to have to record that after several years of successful work as a Unitarian preacher and lecturer in this country, Kristofer Janson turned spiritualist. He was no doubt perfectly sincere in the matter, but his congregations became greatly displeased and lost their confidence in him. Mr. Janson would sit on his porch and hold conversations with Napoleon and other celebrities of the

past and even with Christ and His apostles. His Minneapolis congregation called a meeting to investigate this matter. At this meeting one of the members asked the question:

“Does Kristofer Janson believe in spirits?”

To this Janson replied: “Yes; I have myself talked with spirits.”

But to this picture there is a still darker side. A woman who was a fanatical spiritualist, a Miss Benson, invaded the Janson home and his family was broken up. Without going into further details I may add that Kristofer Janson and his wife, with whom he for so many years had lived an ideal life were separated and Janson afterwards married Miss Benson. Mrs. Drude Janson, who was an exceedingly gifted woman and able writer, went to live in Dresden, in Germany, where she has since died.

Kristofer Janson, with his new wife, returned to Norway in the early '90s and still lives in Christiania. He still continues, in spite of his three score and ten, to preach, lecture and write.

Janson was one of the small number of poets in Norway that received what is called “digtergage,” that is an annual stipend of 1600 crowns from the storting. This stipend he gave up when he emigrated to America, but after his return to Norway in the '90s the storting renewed it. By his charming stories and beautiful lyrics he has won for himself a permanent 303 place in Norway's literature. Some of his songs are as popular as the best of Björnson's and Ibsen's. With all his faults I love him still.